

Rome, 17March 2023

**"Loving our Xaverian vocation".
In preparation for the XVIII GC- (3)**

Since February 22, we have begun the Lenten journey that the Church proposes to us every year. On the first Sunday, we listened to the Gospel's passage from St. Matthew that presents Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1-11). Immediately after being baptized, and having received the Father's revelation of his identity, - "*This is my Son, whom I love. I have sent him*" - he is sent into the desert by the Spirit of God.

It is curious, the least we may say, in a first reading, that it is the Spirit of God who leads him to that arid, uninhabited and lonely place, with a specific purpose: "*to be tempted by the devil*". During *forty days and forty nights*, we can imagine Jesus living his identity as the beloved Son of God the Father with great serenity and joy. But ... "*at the end he was hungry*". And it is at this moment that the devil, making no noise and not knowing where he comes from, appears in his life.

But who is the *devil*? What role does he play in God's plan of salvation for mankind? Why does he appear on the scene from the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry? The Greek word διάβολος originally means '**slanderer**', '**accuser**', the equivalent of the Hebrew *sātān* 'adversary'. Here, we can say that the *devil* is that spiritual reality that manifests itself in human life with the desire and determination to separate human beings from their origin, from God. This is what he tried to do with Jesus. The Why? This remains in the mystery of mysteries. But it is so.

A curiosity arises spontaneously in the form of a question: but Jesus, what was he hungry for? What was the desire that arose in his heart and immediately attracted the interest of the *adversary*? We find the answer in the proposals that the devil made to him. Yes, Jesus, God and man, "*was tested in everything, as we are, but committed no sin*" (Heb 4:15). *The devil's* will is to bring Jesus, the son of God, into his camp; that Jesus, by the concrete choices of life, should turn away from God the Father.

"*The serpent (devil)*," says the book of Genesis, "*was the most cunning of all the wild beasts which God the Lord had made*" (Gen 3:1). And it is precisely in this way, with great cunning, that the Devil appears before Jesus, and questions him about his

identity: "*If you are the Son of God ...*". He wants to put doubt in Jesus' heart: if you are, show it! But in which way? And it is here that his proposal becomes in itself a temptation: he proposes to Jesus choices and ways of living that are the opposite of the baptismal revelation. This is the way of God's adversary: he enters by praising and touching what constitutes the strength and pride of the person (being a child of God) and then slowly leads him to his side; he wants to move from the self at the service of others, and finally, to the self as the center and reference point of everything, *at the first places*.

How does Jesus fight against the power of the enemy? Very simply, with the strength and authority of the Word of God: "*It is written in the Bible also...*". One gets the impression that the Word of God comes to him spontaneously, for he does not hesitate, he responds decisively. Seeing Jesus react like this in front of the power of Evil, one cannot help but think of that maxim that says: *the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart*. When there is the word of God in the heart of the believer, it comes in defense of his baptismal identity, never leaving him alone.

"Loving our Xaverian vocation".

In our preparation for the XVIII General Chapter, it seems to me that we also need to reflect on the presence of the ***devil*** in our lives. It is true that we speak little of it among ourselves, probably as a reaction to a past where it was common to speak of this evil's presence and which brings perhaps unpleasant memories.

However, the mysterious force of evil is present where human beings are. It therefore becomes incumbent on our spiritual health to have a healthy and just concern for the way the Evil One, in his cunning and wickedness, presents himself in the lives of those who have placed themselves entirely in the hands of God the Father and Creator. This point touches directly the theme of the General Chapter.

What are the proposals that the spirit of evil is making to our Xaverian Family today? Each of us is invited to respond, not thinking primarily of others but of himself. To have the courage and lucidity to give the right names to our personal and community reality, made up of lights and shadows, of holy desires and worldly passions, of profound joys and perhaps even existential frustrations, of the desire to be holy *as God our Father is holy*, but entangled here and there in those nauseating habits that have become characteristics of our profound personality, of choices and ways of living and doing that are in open contradiction with our religious-missionary consecration... Only thus, by recognizing the reality of evil in our lives, can we unmask the presence of the Evil One in our midst.

"**Loving our Xaverian vocation**" sends us to the roots of ourselves, of our identity in the Church, of what we are and what we are called to be.

"God Creator and our Father, I NN following Jesus, your Son, before my brothers, and into your hands NN consecrate with vow forever my life to the apostolic activity proper to the Missionary Society of St Francis Xavier. To this end I vow to live in chastity, poverty and obedience as a brother among brothers according to the norms of the Constitutions".

As he did with Jesus, and as he does with every believer, and with all the cunning of which he is capable, the devil tries to draw us away from *our first love* (Rev 2:4), from that YES full of trust offered into the hands of the One who gave us life. He is *simply* interested in the fact that we do not take seriously and radically what was honestly said to the Lord that day. He knows that when this happens, the door is progressively opened to all abuses, since now the center of personal life will no longer be God and his Word, but himself, who in turn becomes the criterion for choices regarding the concrete lifestyle, the activities to do and those to leave aside, the places to frequent... *'You are the salt of the world. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is of no use anymore'* (Mt 5:13).

May our Lord Jesus Christ be known and loved by all!

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